

Linda Clair
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Transcription from Audio Recordings

File 6b – Thursday morning discussion

Question: I have two questions, and they are kind of related. First of all, is it true that enlightenment only happens during the night? That's what I heard – all the sun energy and the moon energy and cooling of passions. And second, this question I've been meaning to ask you – can you now describe how enlightenment happened to you? I read that it happened during a retreat and that you were really sick during that retreat. I want to particularly understand the relationship between sickness and what it does to your spiritual growth.

Linda: That's an interesting question. Well, it happened in the day. Is there a belief that it happens just at night?

Question: In India we celebrate Diwali, the Festival of Lights. So what they say is people get enlightened during the night because during the day is the sun energy, at the night it's the moon energy and it cools off, and the polar opposites. That's what they say, and also when we celebrate Diwali it is during a no-moon day and mostly they say – it was an exception when Mahavira got enlightened on that day when there was no moon – but most people, they say, got enlightened on a full moon day. Because sometimes when I go really deep into my meditation and I've slowed down, that whole thing of "Ah, I'm not going to get enlightened now anyway, it's daytime." (laughter)

Linda: Is it night-time in India right now? (laughter) Is it a full moon tonight, I thought it was last night?

Question: I'd better get prepared! ☺ It just undermines my effort a little bit.

Linda: Forget about everything you've read, everything you've been taught. Yes, forget about everything you've read, everything you've been taught. You might be the exception just like... (laughing) I mean, I don't know for sure.

I know during that retreat, and that was in Japan when I did get sick, something big happened and it was so big I had no idea what had happened. I only realised what had happened in a retreat about six or nine months later – and then it came to fruition. But it was during that retreat in Japan that something definitely happened. But it takes a long time to realise what's happened because it's something completely new. So you can't say, "Oh, I'm enlightened," because you've got no idea what's happening. Because there is this incredible absence, and it's only after a while that you start to realise it's in your body, that it's "Ah, yes," and then it becomes tangible.

But at first, you just don't know. It's such a shock, and not a shock in the way of a thunderbolt hitting you, it's a very different sort of shock, so shocking that you don't know you're in shock. When people are in shock they don't know they're in shock. So it was like that, and it was like that for quite a while. I came back to Australia and I was walking around in shock. Then gradually, gradually during a retreat, I realised what happened.

With the sickness, it was during my stay there in Japan. I was okay, fine actually, I was good – even though I was really, really cold and I had a bit of frostbite and all that stuff – that was actually a very minor thing. But then someone came in, and she'd come from America on a plane, and she brought this really intense sickness – I think she had some sort of pneumonia, eventually it went into bronchial pneumonia – and it just went like wildfire around the place. Almost everyone got sick.

So there was this retreat, or seshin they call it, that I was about to do and it was like, "Okay, I'm going to put everything into this," and I just couldn't. I was so sick, all I could do was just survive every sit. I didn't miss a sit but a couple of times they sent me out because I was coughing really, really badly. But I was sort of okay, and I survived – I had to just give up completely. I had all this drive, "Yes, yes, I'm going to do it this time," and I just had to surrender to this sickness, which I really wasn't used to. That surrender was part of it.

But a lot of people do (get sick) leading up to it, because this is so hard on your body. You don't realise how hard it is on your body in certain ways energetically. People do tend to get a series of illnesses before and it can often happen while you're quite sick. And it can happen to people who are not usually sick, or usually very robust and strong.

The sickness is just the body trying to cope with the energy, and it can't cope for a while because it's just so big and so huge, no matter how healthy you are or how young you are. I think I was forty-six. But I did notice in that monastery, there weren't many people under fifty there. It was so hard being there physically, but a lot of older people – maybe they were already enlightened, I don't know – but there were younger people there, and even they had trouble with it, with the sitting and the knees and everything.

So yes, you can get quite sick just before and it can be quite severe. I know my teacher did and I know other people who have too. It doesn't mean you have to get sick though, it doesn't mean that at all. (laughing) But yes, it can happen.

I remember when everyone was getting sick at this time, the Master there gave a bit of a talk on how to handle illness and being sick. There was a way to handle it where you didn't just get into, "Oh my God, I'm sick," even though people were going to hospital sometimes with this pneumonia, and it was really, really cold too. You don't repress it and go "I'm going to keep going whatever," but you don't completely give in to it emotionally to either. There is this middle ground, this neutrality, this equilibrium that can really help you cope with illness.

During this process you don't need to be incredibly fit, incredibly flexible – I'm a good example of that – incredibly anything. It's just that you make the most of the body that you've got. So it doesn't matter what age, what size, what shape, what fitness level, anything. It's good to be reasonably fit so you can keep going but it doesn't really matter, it's just your body and you use it.

Question: I do this longer sit in the morning sessions and the last four days there's been a lot of pain. It works up to a crescendo, such that when I go into that sit I almost have a bit of anxiety like, "Oh no, I'm doing it again." But yesterday that burning pain on the buttocks, I talked to myself as the sit developed before the pain came and just kept saying to myself, "There's two types of pain: there's the physical pain – you can't stop that, and there's the emotional response to the pain – and you can work with that, it's just a mind state, don't lock into it." It was like a bit of a mantra as I was moving closer to the time where the burning pain would kick in. It was amazing. It was like that

unbearable pain never really developed. The burning pain was still there but it was like it was a little further away.

But what I didn't allow for was that the nausea that comes with the pain became so unbearable, and the restlessness that comes with the pain also became unbearable. The desire to move out of that position was so strong and with those two things going on I couldn't sustain it – I bailed. So today I went in again and it's like, "This time I'm going to deal with pain, I'm going to deal with nausea, I'm going to deal with restlessness." So I started the talk you know, "It's just a mind state. Nausea is just fear. Fear is a mind state – it doesn't exist so don't give it any belief," and on it went. So the pain came in and it was like yesterday, it was still burning but it wasn't anything that I couldn't cope with. There was no nausea and the desire move and to wriggle out of it really wasn't an issue. So I was just there in a real state of, "My God, this mind has been creating so much anticipation and misery," and today I could almost relax into this pain. It was still a slow burn on the cushion but it wasn't unbearable, and the words, "There's peace in this pain," just kept coming up. And another quote kept coming in from Shakespeare, "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." Eventually the restless legs took me out – I didn't work on that one. (laughing) But it was so lovely! For the first time, this pain that has always pulled me out of a long sit, I could sit with it and soften into it and just go back to the breath. So thank you; I think your energy was there sustaining me for a lot of it.

Question: I had some strong pain today, which as you know doesn't usually happen to me. So I just sat with it. It was in my right knee and my right buttock and around my gall bladder. I just sat with it and eventually it softened and became something quite beautiful and almost pleasurable, which was quite amazing. I felt that I could sit with it forever and I could almost want to keep it going because it was such a lovely feeling. I just thought I'd let you know. (laughing)

Linda: Thank you. Good.

Question: I've been having a more difficult retreat; there's a lot of emotion. And there were things going on, several things on top of each other, before I came to retreat that I felt tipped me over what I could process. Certainly in the lead up to retreat it was quite busy so I knew I'd be sitting with some of that here. I find myself wishing I wasn't cracking up right now but it's there. So my question is to ask you about working with these emotions. I'm kind of scared that you'll say it's all just thinking, but there's a sense that there's something different when there's compelling emotion in my body, and a mood and stuff. I find it's much harder to work with than say, the really intense pain – that feels clearer and cleaner and, well, it's still really hard but I know what I'm doing with it. Whereas when I've got the difficult emotion it seems like there's such a strong habit to try and rearrange something with thinking to make myself feel better. It's a much more subtle way I get caught into thinking when there's this really strong mood, or heaviness, or despair or something. So that's what's been happening for me, and I know it will pass. Oh, I wish I could stop this... (crying.)

Linda: Have a good cry. Nobody is going to judge you for crying.

Question: (crying) I did cry twice in the sits and I can see it's just feeling sorry for myself. I struggle with that balance of self-compassion, which I know about, and I need to soften it, without indulging or something, trying to just keep watching.

Linda: No, don't worry about all that stuff, just have a good cry. If you feel like crying, cry. Don't worry about balancing and all that, at the moment. If it's too strong for that just have a cry.

The emotions are, in some ways, harder. The pain that you feel in your body, that M. was just describing and E. was just describing, is the emotions manifesting in the body as sensation and in some ways it's easier to deal with, or clearer, in other ways not. When you feel this emotional, deeply emotional, it's very difficult to dig yourself out of it. You're going to do your best to justify thinking about this stuff and thinking you can work it out and you should be feeling better. But the fact is, at the moment, you're feeling crap. It's stuff that probably needs to come up and probably will only come up in this sort of environment. So allow it to come up.

Don't worry too much about the self-pity thing. It's probably, in a way, going against it and intensifying it because you sort of feel you shouldn't be feeling this emotional, because you might feel it's being a bit weak and self-pitying and stuff. But everyone does quite a bit of crying in this. I know I did. I think, with you, knowing you, it's a valid thing. But it doesn't mean the emotions are justified. You can do anything to justify any sort of emotion or thought. But it's just stuff coming out, coming up, so allow it to. At the end of this retreat you will feel much clearer. But no, you're not going to sort anything out by thinking about it. And don't try and make yourself feel better. Get right into it, feel crap for a while. Just don't feel that you should have to feel better.

And what is better? That's what we're all doing, "Oh, I want to feel better. It's going to be better later. It's not right now." Whereas right now is perfect – just how you need to be feeling.

Question: Thank you Linda.

Linda: I haven't spoken with you yet. 😊

Question: It's been such a full-on retreat so far. I don't know if it's because I haven't been really disciplined about my sits since December, and also the intensity – I wanted to thank you for really putting out about not talking and the "not contact" because it's such a distraction – and that's made it more full-on for me. What happened the other day after the morning sit and during breakfast, I felt like I was disassembling and I went off up there and I just had this thing of, it was so, so deep, it was all of me that really wanted to merge with the absolute. (crying) It sounds really kind of high-falutin but that's what it felt like. I've had that feeling of wanting to dissolve before but this was all of me, so deep, like all I wanted in that moment. I was, honestly, crying a bit, and then somebody walked by and it was like, "Oh god – the control – I've got to get it together," and I went from this intense opening to this complete rigidity and control, which is probably how I live a lot of my life anyway, and it was such a contrast. For the rest of that day I was dealing with all the divisive emotions: I was pissed off, I was irritable, I was angry, judgmental, you name it. It was all that lot, and it took all of that day really. And I thought, "Oh my god, is this who you are? It's pretty bad." (laughing)

Anyway, the next morning I was beginning to settle down a bit and what's come out of it is, "Christ man, you've got to do the work." So I really started to put in some effort because I'm really pretty lazy actually. I really started to put the work into the breathing and it started to relax a bit. So where I'm at now with the practice is I'm doing the breathing and sometimes I'm intensifying the breathing without the counting because sometimes I find the counting a bit distracting. But I do the counting when I'm really distracted with the thoughts, thinking. This last session was a bit harder

because I knew I had to speak, and then I was thinking, “When is she going to come and touch my shoulders?” (laughing) So there was a bit of agitation. But what I’m noticing when I’m stiller is there’s the clarity, and not very often, there’s this very intense clarity. And then there’s a kind of veiling. Somebody the other day was talking about the “gauze,” a slight misty thing there and then there’s the distraction. A bit like something under the water trying to get your attention. And I’ve been having hot flushes like you wouldn’t believe – I didn’t even get many when I was in menopause – ongoing ones and nausea. Lots of different things that I’ve never had before in retreats, burning up stuff.

Linda: Very good. Well, that’s what it is, it’s burning up. You’re burning up. And that experience you had was great – that suddenly someone walked past, you went rigid, and then realised how crap it is being a person and how much stuff you’re holding, and you can’t even fall apart without trying to repress it. And yes, it was just perfect.

Question: The contrast was phenomenal.

Linda: So yes, put everything into it because you don’t want to be this person anymore, you can’t survive being this person any more – it’s horrible.

Question: Thank you so very much. And also thank you for the Qi gong and M. (the yoga) for putting more focus into my body. It’s more loving towards it; it’s really helpful.

Linda: The Qi Gong and the yoga are just amazing. I feel yoga prepares you more physically, not that there’s no energetic component in there of course, but it’s more a physical preparation. And then the Qi gong, even though that’s physical as well, it’s more an energetic preparation. So the two combined I feel are just perfect. In a way I’d like to do half an hour yoga and half an hour Qi Gong but I don’t know if it would work like that. So yes, it is a really good thing. So thank them.

Question: I just wanted to share a small experience. I’ve been trying to make an effort and sit more on the floor because I feel that helps me feel grounded but I have a back issue so I sit a lot in a chair. I know it’s not a weakness and I don’t look at it from that point but sitting on the floor helps me feel grounded. So I persisted with that and use the counting and breathing to sustain me in that. Today I think is the first day when I’ve been doing it on the floor all day which I am very happy about. You’ve probably noticed that English is not my first language, and with counting I always count in English up to ten. But then, if I have to do it quickly, I start counting in Polish from eleven because it’s quicker, it’s almost going back to my first language automatically. And I’ve noticed, it’s funny, at work when we have to put things together, after ten I automatically start in Polish – people laugh. It never happened before ten and around Tuesday I think there was this moment where I wasn’t sure, “Am I counting in Polish or in English?” disorientation. Then I thought, “Let’s see, am I starting in Polish or English?” After I noticed it I decided to either do it in English or Polish and it was fine. But it just made me think that maybe I got into the breathing and counting a bit deeper and my more automatic system, because English I still have to think even if I’m not thinking, counting one to ten, it’s still more thinking than I would do in Polish. So to me it sounded like potentially an indication that I got a bit deeper into less thinking and being automatic in my counting which I think helped me but I was not fussed either way, just never experienced that before.

Linda: That’s interesting. I agree with you – you were thinking less and it was more your body counting and the language was secondary.

Question: Yes, it helped me be on the floor more comfortably, so very positive.

Linda: Very good.

Question: And the other thing is, I struggle with time in a sense, I always want to know where I am within time. I found the notes from my first retreat here which was probably three years ago roughly. That was when we were still in the room upstairs. I almost had a panic attack the first night when I couldn't see the clock in that room because it got dark and I couldn't see where I am within an hour. Then someone took the batteries out. (laughter) I don't know if you did it on purpose or it was just people were annoyed by it ticking. It's a recurring issue for me; I have to know where within time I am. But again, this retreat I just made an effort and I don't have my watch, I don't look at the clock behind me, and so far, so good. It's not that I'm bored within an hour; I just want to know am I in a first quarter of an hour, second quarter of an hour or... (laughing) But now time feels like a dough, like when you are making pasta and the dough becomes elastic. That's how time became for me and again, that helps sustain me here sitting on the floor more.

Linda: Anything that helps, do it. The time thing is a really good practice to do; to not look at it all the time. So good, that's really good.

Question: I found B's question to you about the counting – even though I'd heard what you say maybe a hundred times before – somehow or other your response touched me in a much deeper way. The early morning sit I find potentially deeper, and I try to begin sitting early. This morning it felt that with that more aware emphasis on the counting, it just seemed to dissolve the bit over an-hour-and-a-half, I was there and felt good. But then in the Qi Gong, at one stage, we had our hands on the part of my body that's had lots of pain in the last months – coinciding with a tremendous amount of family stress – suddenly there was a knowing the truth of what you say, that "I" is the source of all thinking. It was just, "Ah, I know," and that, "I am not enough as I am," but that "I" was absolutely the source of all thinking.

Linda: What do you mean I am not enough as I am?

Question: It was just hands on our back, and then that, "I mightn't be doing it right." I could see that was ludicrous but the incredible gift was that "I" is the source of thought.

Linda: Yes, I felt that when I touched you. It's okay. You're not doing anything wrong. (laughing)

Question: I would have thought years ago that I stopped feeling that I am not okay. But clearly at a deep level it's very much there, or has been.

Linda: It takes a long, long time for that to dissolve, to go, bit by bit by bit, yes.

I was going to say I used to be a very competitive person. My mother said I was extremely competitive. I was so competitive I had no idea how competitive I was. It was actually a really good quality. Stop laughing C.! (laughing) C. told me one day I was competitive and I was gob smacked: I said "What, what?!" And my Mum was the same. I asked her and she started laughing and said, "How can you ask that question? You hated coming second, you had to be first all the time."

(laughing) It really helped with this practice. I wanted to be the best student; I just wanted this and I would do anything to get it. I was quite ruthless in some ways but you sort of have to be.

But I have noticed that even with realisation there was still this residual – and I think in everyone – some sort of strong quality in them is still there after realisation. It's something that you have to see and work with. I can finally say that I think there's virtually none there. If there is it's just playing games, it's nothing serious. C. might laugh with my discussions with F., but that's just games; it's nothing serious. It's a residual thing that takes a long time to finally dissolve.

But I can see it really helped me in this whole thing where I went, "I'm going to do this whatever." And you do need a bit of a competitive, "Ach, I'm going to do it." I might have been a bit over the top at times; other people have got other qualities. Everyone's got qualities that they can use to their advantage and then nurture other qualities that might be lacking that they might need a bit more of to balance out. In the end everything balances out. But I can only really say very recently that I don't have that very strong competitive thing anymore; it's gradually, gradually happened though. So yes, things take a long time. Deep stuff that's been there since you were a child, a baby probably, takes a long time. I don't know if I was a competitive baby, "Me, me!" (laughing)

I'd do it in a subtle understated way so people didn't always realise. But that's actually the way, to get your mind to do it in a more subtle understated way, not an aggressive, "I'm going to get you," but more... If you're underestimated you've got more power. I read this funny thing recently – it was quite true and I forget exactly what it said. It said that if you go around wearing one of your pant legs higher than the other, people won't expect as much from you. (laughter) I thought it was brilliant! If you wear something inside out or something, people just write you off.

The funny thing is, in some ways, it's the way I've always taught. I don't dress in these outrageous clothes or anything, just very subtle stuff. And some people go, "Oh, she can't be enlightened because she's too ordinary, she's too like me." But if you recognise it in someone who is more like you, it will have more power. And I can surprise you when you least expect it. (laughter) So being underestimated gives you quite a bit of power.